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Le roman d'Alexandre ou Le roman de toute chevalerie. Thomas de Kent , Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas , Laurence Harf-Lancner , Brian Foster , Ian Short

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the power dynamics between lover and lady in “Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro.” An epilogue reiterates the general point that optical material is used in order to develop subjectivity and to portray power relations; this section then concludes by examining some later adaptations of medieval imagery in Petrarch, Spenser, and Donne.

Although the main emphasis of the book falls upon the literary permutations of optical theory, Stewart is throughout cognizant of the range of other discourses—biblical, classical, patristic, magical—that influence the portrayal of subjects in medieval poetry. This emphasis upon the play of a multiplicity of traditions, especially in the poetry of Cavalcanti and Dante, is one of her many virtues. Of course, books on technical topics will always generate their fair share of qualifications. It is, for example, not wholly appropriate to speak of “images” (as Stewart repeatedly does) in medieval optical theory. And although she handles the primary sources well, more attention might have been paid to the overlapping nature of various categories of optical writings, especially by the final third of the thirteenth century, and in the poetry of Cavalcanti and Dante. Thus, Aristotelian commentaries (e.g., Albert the Great, *De anima* 2.3.13) may well have provided Cavalcanti with the phenomena of blinding and visual pain for which Stewart refers to John Peckham in her main text (see pp. 84–85) and relegates the Aristotelian tradition to the notes. Equally, Stewart makes an interesting case for the technical precision of Dante’s views on optics in one key passage from the *Convivio* that refers to the optical nerve and its position along a straight line into the eye. The similarities she suggests with Alhazen are interesting, although one should note that discussion of the optical nerve is found widely in medieval treatments of double vision and once again some passages in Aristotelian commentaries seem to push in this direction (cf. Albert the Great, *De animalibus* 1.2.7, 1.2.18, and 12.3.3; *De anima* 2.3.14). As far as the oscillation between extramission and intramission in Dante is concerned, Stewart’s suggestion of Roger Bacon’s combined extramission-intramission theory is intriguing but (at least for this reviewer) ultimately unsatisfactory (one wonders instead about the weight of poetic tradition and the possible presence of Augustinian passages such as *Confessiones* 10.27.38 and more generally Augustine’s own theory of vision). Finally, one might take issue with part of the epilogue, which, after offering a stimulating account of Petrarch’s lyric poetry, provides rather sketchy coverage of Spenser.

All in all, though, these quibbles amount to minor points, often no more than questions of emphasis, and they should not detract from an important book that successfully achieves its stated aims of providing new perspectives on gender and lyric subjectivity and showing the extensive poetic assimilation of optical science. The book is especially valuable for its ability to synthesize and offer relevant criticism of existing scholarly opinion, for its good, close analysis of the poems themselves, and for its scholarly handling of scientific and philosophical texts (including technical sources in Latin) and their transmission. What is more, the book is written with clarity and precision, and there are only a couple of minor typographical errors in the notes and bibliography. For all these reasons, Stewart’s book deserves to find a wide readership among medievalists, literary scholars, art historians, and perhaps even historians of science.

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THOMAS DE KENT, *Le roman d’Alexandre ou Le roman de toute chevalerie*, trans. (into modern French) Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas and Laurence Harf-Lancner. Avec le texte édité par Brian Foster et Ian Short. (Champion Classiques, Moyen Age, 5.) Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003. Paper. Pp. lxxxi, 743. €15.

Much has been written on the exploits of Alexander the Great, and his feats and accomplishments have also been depicted in sculptures, mosaics, paintings, and manuscript min-

iaures. Medieval France produced two key monuments. The first is *Le roman d'Alexandre*, produced in the 1180s by Alexandre de Bernai (Alexander of Paris), a gifted compiler, whose work occasioned many follow-ups and interpolations. The other is the *Roman d'Alexandre* or *Roman de toute chevalerie*, attributed to Thomas of Kent. Thomas seems to have written his work in Plantagenet England probably some years before the great compilation of Alexander of Paris. Unlike Alexander's work, the one by Thomas of Kent did not have a notable impact.

Thomas's Anglo-Norman text was edited some decades ago by Brian Foster and Ian Short. Their text now appears accompanied by an excellent facing-page translation into modern French by Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas and Laurence Harf-Lancner. This initiative is more than commendable since Thomas's text is not always clear. Indeed it is becoming increasingly imperative to facilitate access to the masterpieces of the past by means of adequate translations with (and this is essential) commentaries that not only situate the translated text in its proper cultural context but also signal its specific characteristics.

The fifty-odd pages (pp. 643–99) with variant readings will raise a few eyebrows since the text edited by Foster and Short cannot properly be considered critical: the editors have even suppressed entire fragments that they deemed “illegible” or “repetitive.” One wonders why a volume that seeks to offer a modern translation to the interested reader should contain a lengthy series of variant readings organized fairly unsystematically and without any commentary whatsoever. What should one make, for instance, of the remark on page 668 that there is “a large initial in C” (one of the manuscripts)? The function of such a remark completely eludes me.

A serious study of the manuscript tradition and the codicological aspects of the extant manuscripts would have been appropriate, for then one would have had the opportunity to form interesting conclusions on the sociological context in which the manuscripts were produced. Note 7 on page xiii does provide some interesting remarks on this subject, but it should be admitted that they are fairly hypothetical and, curiously enough, the translators do not dwell on the topic for very long. In any event, the introduction of codicological details into a whole series of graphical and lexical variants is not very helpful.

Of greater interest is the detailed introduction that precedes the translation. Quite justly the authors emphasize what seems to have been the *modus operandi* of Thomas of Kent. More than Alexander of Paris, Thomas worked with Latin encyclopedic texts. As a result his interventions produced a text that is quite different from Alexander's and even slightly ambiguous. To be sure, the outline of the plot remains the same: Alexander seizes power, wages war on Darius III, king of Persia, and on Porus, king of India, and after having lived through numerous adventures, he dies. His exploits arouse admiration, but, quite surprisingly, at the end of his text Thomas says that Alexander's men had hated him and had even poisoned him (vv. 8044–46). This is quite contrary to what happens in the fourth branch of Alexander of Paris's *roman*, where the barons lament the loss of a good master who had taken care of them and whom they had followed wherever he went (except at the point when the expedition ran the risk of ending in disaster—then they succeeded in convincing the king to retreat). The aggression that surfaces in the last stanza of the version by Thomas of Kent is completely absent from the Continental *roman*.

This capital difference between the two endings is anticipated in the section devoted to the king's adventures in youth. The king in the Continental version knows that he can count on his men because he respects them and frees them from their material and financial worries. The insular Alexander, on the contrary, is a more discrete prince, putting into practice Anglo-Norman ideas grafted onto a very monarchical perception of power. In this respect Thomas's view of kingship is very different from that of Alexander of Paris.

The two translators should have insisted more on this fundamental difference. At the end of their introduction (p. lxxv) they state that “c'était un héros prométhéen qui se lançait

à l'assaut de l'Orient, c'est un sage qui meurt, presque un saint, en tout cas un homme conscient que sa vie donne à l'humanité entière un exemple de la vanité de la puissance terrestre. Thomas de Kent a l'audace de transformer progressivement en un croyant humble et soumis à son créateur un héros dont la tradition occidentale condamne presque toujours l'*hybris*." This seems to me in plain contradiction of verses 8040–46. I fail to understand the reason for this purely literary interpretation, which lacks a proper motivation and which seems to ignore a perhaps more dominant sociopolitical basis.

That is not the only problem. The "encyclopedic" side of Thomas's text also demands attention. The inventory of *mirabilia* effectively transforms the text and perhaps even changes the adventure of the Macedonian hero into a quest for knowledge. But Thomas merely parades his learning and does little to help us situate these erudite *Fremdkörper* in the narrative structure of his text. For—and this is essential—the "exotic" passages that Thomas takes from his sources are lined up one after the other and upset or, if you will, refashion the plot of a narrative that, after all, is nothing but a traditional *vita* presenting the life of a man from his birth to his death. What are we to make of this reorientation of the story? Was it intentional? Was it purely coincidental because of the presence of encyclopedic texts in the libraries where Thomas worked? Or was it the result of a specifically detailed commission? A commission from the Plantagenets, perhaps? There will probably never be a satisfactory answer, but the translators would have rendered a great service to their readers if they had elaborated a bit more on the options just mentioned.

In other respects the work is excellent and bears witness to a great understanding, even a perfect mastery, of insular Old French. The two translators merit praise for their great task, rendered especially difficult because of the many problematic denotations and connotations of Old French.

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ANNE B. THOMPSON, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary*. Aldershot, Eng., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003. Pp. xii, 224; black-and-white frontispiece. \$79.95.

Storytelling is perhaps the most characteristic feature of popular literature of any age. In Middle English literature, these stories are almost always linked to a larger religious and moral purpose. The massive and diverse *South English Legendary* (late thirteenth century, in over sixty manuscripts) is a rich repository of such stories, though it is probably better known to medievalists by name and reputation than by detailed acquaintance.

Anne Thompson's study goes a long way toward making the *Legendary* more familiar to Middle English scholars who seek to recover the "horizon of expectations" of a medieval audience encountering one or more of the saints' lives in the collection (over fifty in the most complete manuscript, excluding the *temporale*). Hans Robert Jauss figures prominently in Thompson's analysis, as does Thorlac Turville-Petre's *England the Nation*, which describes the vernacular literary culture created by Middle English popular literature. Thompson's chapter 2, "Writing in English," provides helpful context for biblical translations, the *Ormulum*, the *Cursor mundi* (also treated in chapter 3), *Handlyng Synne*, and relevant historical figures (Wulfstan, Simon de Montfort, Becket), but it seems unlikely that anyone picking up a book on the *Legendary* would need that kind of information or that anyone seeking it would think to look here. Her stated hope that she "complement" Turville-Petre more than "repeat" him is not quite met (p. 21). We get a conventional treatment of English as the emergent language of the lower classes in tension with French, the language of power.